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What's Happening in Hawaii

Ruby Hargrave

Executive Director, Honolulu Community Action Program

Honolulu Community Action Program

The Honolulu Community Action Program, Inc. (HCAP), a 501(c)(3) entity, has been operating since September 1965. HCAP is a creation of the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964. In 1980, our funding came under the Federal Community Services Block Grant, administered by the State. The goal of the agency is to provide opportunities to low-income families on Oahu to become self-sufficient.

It is a federal mandate that the CAP agencies be governed by a tri-partite board. HCAP has a 30-member policymaking board, which consists of one-third resident sector, one-third private, and one-third public. The resident and private sector representatives may serve for five consecutive years, stay off for one year, and serve another five for a total of 10 years. The public sector does not have a term limitation.

Over its 35 years existence, HCAP has operated a variety of programs addressing the needs of the very young, the youth, families, and the senior population. According to Pacific Business News, HCAP operates the largest preschool program “Head Start” in the State of Hawaii. Kamehameha Schools ranks second.

Employment readiness, job placement, business development, agricultural training and education, welfare-to-work, community planning/ leadership development, and youth employment are some of the programs HCAP operates.

The program you may be most interested in is our energy program. In 1977, HCAP received a federal demonstration grant of \$409,747 which was used to provide energy conservation and consumer education. The thrust was to help the low income families decrease their utility cost. We partnered with Hawaii Job Corps to fabricate and install solar water heater panels for about 124 low income homeowners.

We were responsible to recruit and certify for eligibility, provide energy education, and purchase new hot water heaters. Under the tutelage of Irwin Shimada, Job Corps students fabricated and installed the solar panels on 124 homes. We had some interesting results as the program progressed. Several of the private, local solar companies were hiring our student fabricators and installers.

During the monitoring of the program, we found families who celebrated their utility savings by purchasing electrical appliances they didn't have before. We talked to the families and broached the idea of giving back to the program by putting a portion of their utility savings as a result of the solar installation. The donation was entirely voluntary. About 45 families participated in the pay back program. Approximately, half of them paid for the entire cost of the solar system. The funds were used for repairs that occurred at a later date. As a matter of fact, HCAP honored a repair request several years ago.

We had hoped to receive future funding so we could continue the program but the federal government changed their focus and established the Weatherization Assistance Program providing smaller grants to install water heater jackets and timers. Later they included heat pumps, which was done through a bid process with private vendors.

In 1996, the U. S. Department of Energy added solar hot water heating systems to the Weatherization Assistance Program. The same year, the Island of Kauai and Hawaii were awarded a small grant to install solar systems, in addition to heat pumps, timers and jackets. The following year, Maui and Oahu received their grant. Oahu received \$65,800, which allowed for 10 solar systems. This grant also included the cost of heat pumps, timers and jackets.

This year, HCAP's weatherization grant is \$33,219 to provide installation of 15 water heater jackets, 8 water heater timers, and 6 solar systems.

In 1980, the U. S. Department of Energy introduced the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP). Families would apply for a pre-determined amount toward their utility bill if they were in a shut-off or about to be shut-off situation. The program, however, has since been revised to include a pre-determined amount for **credit** toward the utility bill.

Currently, the Department of Human Services administers LIHEAP statewide. HCAP is contracted to do recruitment and certification. Applicants are allowed to apply for either Energy Crisis Intervention or Energy Credit with Hawaiian Electric Company or the Gas Company. The program is conducted annually for one month, usually in the month of June. Although the program does not conserve energy, the families find relief in their utility cost.

Our LIHEAP contract states that HCAP is responsible to refer individuals to and coordinate with any other existing federal, state or local low income energy program. When processing LIHEAP applications, we do provide information on the Weatherization Assistance Program. If the applicant is interested, we have them complete an application for an energy device.

The State's allocation for year 2000 is \$1,252,186.00. Last year, the allocation was \$1,159,827. The outer island Community Action Agencies are also contract by the State to do recruitment and certification. Administrative cost to the CAP agencies is based on performance.

This summer, President Clinton released emergency funds from the LIHEAP budget to pay for utilities in the mainland states that were suffering from high heat. During the winter, the states will be awarded subsidies towards alleviating their high cost for heating.

HCAP feels investing in solar systems would benefit low income families on a continuing basis through energy conservation, which results in a decrease in utility bills. The federal government allows the states to use up to 15% of their LIHEAP allocation towards providing other energy saving devices to low income families to reduce their energy cost. The Hawaii State Plan does not include this option. With the rising cost of fuel, the State should look into providing other energy saving devices, in addition to providing relief to families on their utility bills.